The Transformation of Intimacy and Privacy through Social Networking Sites

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1. Introduction

Since social media exploded onto the media landscape, numerous scholars have been quick to comment on the way in which these tools of sociability and communication have radically transformed existing notions and experiences of privacy and intimacy. boyd (2008) asserts that in the past privacy was taken for granted because it was easier not to share than to share, but with the advent of social networking sites (SNSs), the equation has been inverted. As Papacharissi and Gibson point out: "SNSs cultivate practices that prompt users to be more public with their information by default. While it is possible for users to edit these settings, the code that belies the structure of the network makes it easier to share than to hide information" (Papacharissi & Gibson, 2011, p. 77). Most popular SNSs encourage sharing because they involve disclosure of personal information to foster interaction with other users (Joinson et al, 2012). Utz and Krämer (2009) argue that SNSs are effective tools of self-promotion. This is achieved through heavily edited biographical information, countless pictures, and the publicity of numerous 'friend' relationships, which imply popularity. Thus, Baym argues that in SNSs, self-disclosure is essential in order to foster and maintain ongoing relationships and to turn strangers into relational partners because it is a necessary part of getting to know one another and building trust (Baym, 2010). Trepte and Reinecke affirm that privacy helps to build trusting relationships online: "By creating intimate social interactions and enhancing confidentiality and trust among interaction partners, privacy is very likely to increase the willingness for openness, sincerity, and truthfulness in close relationships" (Trepte & Reinecke, 2011, p. 67). Also, Trepte and Reinecke suggest that the subjective experience of privacy sometimes may be even richer through social media than offline because people perceive that they can share their thoughts and feelings without censorship with selected publics: "People create *online spaces of social and psychological privacy* that may be an illusion; however these spaces seem to be experienced as private and the technical and architecture of the Social Web supports this notion" (Trepte & Reinecke 2011, p. 62). Thus a close relationship between privacy, disclosure and intimacy is suggested in SNSs.

According to Ito and others, "there is a growing public discourse (both hopeful and fearful) declaring that young people's use of digital media and communication technologies defines a generational identity distinct from that of their elders" (Ito et al., 2009, p. 2). Similarly, Thompson (2008), van Manen (2010), and Jurgenson and Rey (2012) suggest that young people today are

already developing a different attitude toward their privacy, as they are aware of surveillance but they do not want to miss the opportunity to show off. Thompson (2008, p. 7) argues that youth's attitude toward their privacy: "is simultaneously vigilant and laissez-faire. They curate their online personas carefully as possible, knowing that everyone is watching". Yet, Ito et al. found in their research in the Digital Youth Project that "new media provide(s) a new venue for intimacy practices, a venue that renders these practices simultaneously more public and more private. Young people can now meet people, flirt, date, and break up outside of the earshot and eyesight of their parents and other adults while also doing these things in front of all their online friends" (Ito et al., 2009, p. 2). Sherry Turkle (2010) adds to this recognition of some of the tensions inherent in intimacy and privacy practices in social media by asserting that some teenagers are gratified by a certain public exposure because they feel it is a validation, not a violation, of their privacy. Nevertheless, these conclusions which come from the abundant research about the use of new media by teenagers are not compared with research about adult behaviour. Therefore, as Bauman pointed out: "It would be a grave mistake to suppose that the urge towards a public display of the 'inner self' and the willingness to satisfy that urge are manifestations of a unique, purely generational, age related urge/addiction of teenagers, keen as they naturally tend to be to get a foothold in the 'network'" (Bauman, 2007, p. 3). Also, the latest report of the Pew Internet Research Center (2012) about 'Privacy management on social media sites' shows that the choices that adult and teenage social media users make regarding their privacy settings are virtually identical. This suggests that there is not a privacy generation gap.

This paper attempts to engage with the general questions about intimacy, privacy and relationships that social media brings to academic and political debates. A further aim is to question if intimacy online exists at all, as some authors consider that intimacy through SNSs ceases to be intimacy and becomes something else (Sibilia, 2008; Turkle, 2010; Mateus, 2010), or it is illusory (van Manen, 2008; Taddicken & Jers, 2011). In order to do this, the concepts of privacy and intimacy need to be discussed in the context of social media. This will be addressed in the next section.

2. Privacy and Intimacy in the Age of Social Media

Bauman (2006) and Illouz (2008) suggest that a new 'emotional culture' based on an ideal of authenticity through the display of intimacy is generating new intersections of public and private life. In this changing environment, intimate lives are increasingly represented and articulated through social media, which are public by default. Thus, boyd claims that new media technology makes "social information more easily accessible and can rupture people's sense of public and private by altering the previously understood social norms" (boyd, 2008, p. 19). Also, Nissenbaum states that the activities and interactions through SNSs cannot be clearly categorized as either public or private

within this dichotomy (Nissenbaum, 2010). Other authors suggest alternatives for the problematic traditional privacy-publicity dichotomy applied to social media. Ford (2011) proposes a model of privacy as a continuum. Ford affirms that users can experience different levels of privacy in function of the control to the access to their information. On the other hand, Jurgenson & Rey point out that, as boyd (2011) observed, privacy and publicity are 'intertwined' and assert that: "publicity and privacy do not always come at the expense of one another but, at times, can be mutually reinforcing" (Jurgenson & Rey, 2012, p. 191). For example, when someone shares part of a story publicly through a SNS, there is always a part of the story that is not told, hence the rest of the story becomes more valuable for those who will have access to it, and the relationship with the confidant is more intimate by given them private, exclusive access.

Intimacy can be shared and disclosed in private or in public; there is no invasion of privacy if the self-disclosure is voluntary, as Gerety pointed out: "[I]nvasions of privacy take place whenever we are deprived of control over such intimacies of our bodies and minds as to offend what are ultimately shared standards of autonomy" (Gerety, 1997, p. 268). In the private realm, commonly accepted community rules pretend to preserve intimacy and, at the same time, erect barriers against intrusions by the public. Also there are certain kinds of behaviour people prefer to perform without witnesses or with selected relationships within the private sphere. It is usually the sphere where people share their intimacy, as Garzón observes: "[T]he private realm often is also the most appropriate realm for revealing some part of our intimacy (because, in general, this is less dangerous here than in the public sphere)" (Garzón, 2003, p. 27). Nevertheless, in contemporary society, intimate lives are increasingly represented and articulated in public realms. Thus, (Reynolds, 2010, p. 35) states: "[T]he very nature of intimacy in relation to private and public realms has to be reconceived and re-valorised within ethical and emancipating discourse". Giving the things I discuss here, I need to explore the concepts of privacy and intimacy and their specifities in the context of social media, which I do below.

2-1 Privacy in Digital Context

Privacy can be seen as a right, a value, a claim or a commodity (Nissenbaum, 2011; Papacharissi, 2010). It can be a descriptive, a normative or a legal concept. Nissenbaum states that as privacy is important as a right, and it is considered to "play a crucial role in supporting other moral and political rights and values" (Nissenbaum, 2011, p. 13), it deserves legal protection and moral consideration. In contrast, boyd contests this concept, in her opinion "privacy is not an inalienable right – it is a privilege that must be protected socially and structurally in order to exist" (boyd, 2008, p. 19). Fried (1968) affirms that privacy is essential to the diversity of social relationships we maintain. Fried states that "the rights of privacy are among other basic entitlements which men

must respect in each other; and mutual respect is the minimal precondition for love and friendship" (Fried, 1968, p. 211). Thus, Rachels holds that the value of privacy is based "on the idea that there is a close connection between our ability to control who has access to us and to information about us, and our ability to create and maintain different sorts of social relationships with different people"(Rachels, 1975, p. 326). As noted by Schoeman (1984, p. 416): "The nonintrusion norms that privacy involves allow people to pursue and develop meaningful relationships". Likewise, Gerstein (1984, p. 271) argues that: "[I]ntimacy could not exist unless people had the opportunity for privacy. Excluding outsiders and resenting their uninvited intrusions are essential parts of having intimate relationships".

From the informational point of view, Reiman defines privacy as "the condition under which other people are deprived of access to either some information about you or some experience of you" (Reiman, 1976, p. 30; 1995, p. 30), meanwhile Fried adds that "privacy is not simply an absence of information about us in the mind of others, *rather* it is the control we have about information about ourselves" (Fried, 1968, p. 482). Similarly, Innes (1992) states that privacy functions through control, and we handle the control of our personal and intimate information through privacy. Westin agrees with Fried as he defines privacy as "the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how and to what extent information about them is communicated to others" (Westin, 1967, p. 7). Notwithstanding, Nissenbaum (2010) and McCreary (2008) argue that the concept of privacy is not only a matter of control over personal information, but privacy also includes reasonable expectation of common norms about the flow of our information, shaped by habit and convention in order to evolve solutions that allow us to live together in a civilized society. Nissenbaum states that there is some personal information we have expectation to keep private, which she labels "intimacies of personal identity"[1]. In every society, argues Nissenbaum, there are different expectations relating to privacy about different matters, as privacy is a concept which is culturally shaped (Nissenbaum, 2010).

Following the work of Westin, Burgoon and fellows distinguish four dimensions of privacy: informational, social, psychological and physical. They define informational privacy as "the ability to control who gathers and disseminates information about one's self or group and under what circumstances" (Burgoon, et al., 1989, p. 134). Burgoon describes social privacy as "an individual's ability to withdraw from social intercourse" (Burgoon, 1982, p. 216) and considers it necessary to establish close relationships separated from the others. Psychological privacy includes both the freedom to decide what, when, and to whom to disclose personal feelings and thoughts (Burgoon, 1982), and finally physical privacy is referred to as "the freedom from surveillance and unwanted intrusions upon one's space by the physical presence, touch, sights, sounds, or odours of others"

(Burgoon et al., 1989, p. 132). Trepte and Reinecke apply the informational, social and psychological dimensions of privacy discussed by Burgoon to social media. In terms of social privacy, SNSs permit users to control "[w]ith whom to interact and to share information by means of mechanisms such as friends lists" (Trepte & Reinecke, 2011, p. 64). Thus, Trepte and Reinecke (2011, p. 71) suggest that as a result of this fine-grained 'customized-privacy': "people perceive a loss of informational privacy but perceive a considerable amount of social and psychological privacy in online contexts". They believe that social media create psychological privacy because it provides a free private space insomuch as social media offers the possibility for publishing one's thoughts and feelings and control the audience one wants to share this intimate information with. Different levels of self-disclosure define different types of relationships (close friends, friends, acquaintances, etc).

Nowadays people use SNSs' profiles to locate a great amount of biographical information in order to claim attention from others, argues Aboujaude (2010). The growing sharing and disclosure of intimate information through Facebook lead Mark Zuckerberg to vindicate in 2010 that privacy is no longer a 'social norm'(Arrington, 2010). This ideological position is based in the idea that openness and transparency are positive for society and interpersonal relations (Joinson et al., 2011). This ideology could explain why more and more people are exhibiting their intimacy as they may consider that openness is beneficial for their relationships. In this process Cohen (2012, p. 135) suggests: "Norms of transparency and exposure are developed to legitimate and reward practices of self-exposure and peer exposure. These practices are the morality plays of contemporary networked life, they operate as both spectacle and discipline". Nevertheless, Solove (2007) claims that 'people still want privacy' despite privacy in the age of social media being much more complex than before. In his opinion, the main issue is how to negotiate privacy concerns and social capital needs in a social media environment in front of networked publics: "[R]arely can we completely conceal information about our lives, but that doesn't mean that we don't expect to limit its accessibility, ensure that it stays within a particular social circle, or exercise some degree of control over it" (Solove, 2007, p. 200). Likewise, Leino-Kilpia et al. (2001) affirm that privacy can be understood as an individual's control over his or her circles of intimacy. Yet, boyd (boyd, 2010a) suggests that privacy concerns arise around sharing information online due to the characteristics of information online: persistent, replicable, searchable and scalable[2], and dynamics of use (such as invisible audiences, or context collapse) of social media. Accordingly, as noted by Palfrey and Grasser, false or misleading information and unintentionally revealed private information can be far more damaging when it appears on the Internet than if the same information were gossiped about verbally or in writing, because the magnitude of the damage caused by harmful information, "in terms of who can access it, when, how, and over what period of time, continues to increase as the use of the technology increases" (Palfrey & Grasser, 2008, p. 63). In addition, not only does self-disclosed

information put the user under threat, but also the visible communications linked to them by “friends” which may reach wider audiences. As Joinson observed, “This co-creation of users’ profile is carried out through actions such as wall posts, comments, and the tagging of photos or location” (Joinson et al., 2011, p. 35). Ellison et al. observe that the access to novel information in Facebook may help to bridge social capital, but “it may also result in negative personal or professional outcomes associated with the unanticipated disclosure of information about the self to unintended audiences” (Ellison et al., 2011, p. 30). Moreover, the relationship between privacy and self-disclosure is further complicated by the presence of different audiences such as friends, family, co-workers, acquaintances and so on, within a single space. Yet, boyd (2008, p. 6) asserts that “as a direct result of these structural changes, another form of convergence is emerging: social convergence. Social convergence occurs when disparate social contexts are collapsed into one”, and this clash might be problematic because different social context provides different kinds of norms which lead individuals to behave in a certain way (e.g., a person behaves quite differently in the pub than at work). Ellison et al. (2011) argue that people can use three strategies in order to control the audience for their disclosures on SNSs: friending behaviours, disclosures on the site, and managing audiences via privacy settings. Accepting only known ‘friends’ can be a good strategy for general SNSs as Facebook or Bebo, but in other SNSs where the interaction is mostly among strangers the gain of social capital will be almost annihilated if users only interact with people they already know offline. Also the disclosure of only superficial information about oneself is another strategy commonly used to control privacy (Attril & Jalil, 2011). Finally, despite half of social media users affirming that they have some difficulty in managing the privacy settings on their profile, as the last study of the Pew Internet Research Center (2012) shows, configuring privacy controls to manage different audience is starting to be common practice. In the United States, most of SNSs users have changed their privacy settings (public by default) in order to protect their privacy, and only 26% of men and 14% of women still keep their profiles public. There is a clear gap between genders, and men appear to be less worried about their privacy than women (Pew Internet Research Center, 2012). Nevertheless, even using all the tools available to control privacy online there are still risks that cannot be controlled such as the monitoring and tracking, or identity theft. Thus, the question here is: *why do individuals present their intimacy through social media despite the potential hazards related to privacy?* Some studies about privacy and new media identify different motivations which lead people to disclose personal information while socializing online: “faith in the networking service or trust in its members; myopic evaluation of privacy risks”(Gross & Acquisti, 2005, p. 73), impression management (Utz & Krämer, 2008; Tufekci, 2008a; Krämer & Haferkamp, 2011), affects, pleasures, exchange of ideas (Lasén and Gómez-Cruz, 2009) or gaining social capital from the interaction with other users due to the affordances of the social service (Ellison et al, 2011). Also, Tufecki found in his research that women are more likely to use SNSs to keep in touch with family and existing

friends, while men, although also use these sites to keep in touch with existing relationships, are more often attempting to meet new people (Tufekci, 2008b). According to Tufecki, that is the reason why men protect their privacy less in order to have the opportunity to meet more people. Recent studies (Krasnova, 2010; Krämer & Haferkamp, 2011) have found that the higher the level of privacy concerns the less the disclosure on SNSs and, hence, the less social capital gained.

In order to ensure liberty of choice in the selection of the people to be intimate with, some kind of control is necessary. As Garety states: “we should be able to share our intimacy with others only as we choose. It is the value of sharing such knowledge that is at stake in the right to privacy” (Gerety, 1997, p. 268). Privacy, as stated by Schoeman (1984) includes the norms which protect personal and intimate information and it is also the gated space where people can develop meaningful relationships away from the watch of the outsiders, and grants the control over information and space which enables us to maintain degrees of intimacy (Gerstein, 1984). In the next section I will explore more deeply the concept of intimacy and the characteristics of intimacy practices on social media. Also I will question if intimacy online really exists in social media as many authors consider that intimacy in public ceases to be intimacy and becomes something else (Sibilia, 2008; Turkle, 2010).

2-2 Redefining Intimacy in the Age of Social Media

The popular meaning of intimacy, as Jamieson points out, is often a kind of ‘closeness, of knowing, of being attached to another person’. Self-help books common recommendations of “talking and listening, sharing your thoughts, showing your feelings” (Jamieson, 1998: 1), are what Jamieson labels ‘disclosing intimacy’. Some scholars define intimacy related to the act of sharing (Rachels, 1975; Fried, 1968; Plummer, 2003). Thus intimacy is understood in its informational dimension as “the sharing of information about one’s actions, beliefs, or emotions which one does not share with all, and which one has the right not to share with anyone” (Fried, 1984, p. 211). Nonetheless, other authors (Reiman, 1976; Innes, 1996) do not consider enough the act of sharing personal information in order to define the concept of intimacy, but it is the context of love, liking, and caring which makes sharing of inner information significant: “The revealing of personal information then is not what constitutes or powers the intimacy. Rather it depends and fills out, invites and nurtures, the caring that powers the intimacy” (Reiman, 1976, p. 305). Thus, meaningful relationships (based on love or friendship, for instance), the intimate relationships we value for its own sake, are the realm where intimacy flourishes. Also Fried (1984), Reiman (1976) and Iness (1996) find the value and substance of intimacy in its exclusiveness, as being a scarce, restricted commodity. As Reiman states the value of intimacy lies “not merely in what I have but essentially in what others do not have. The reality of my intimacy with you is constituted not simply by the

equality and intensity of what we share, but by its unavailability to others _in other words, by its scarcity" (Reiman, 1976, p. 305). Jamieson agrees with Reiman, Iness and Plummer in the need for some kind of liking or love in order to call a relationship 'intimate', but she does not believe that all intimate relationship involve caring and sharing. Thus, "[I]ntimacy involves close association, privileged knowledge, deep knowing and understanding and some form of love, but it need not include practical caring and sharing" (Jamieson, 1998, p. 13). She identifies four different kinds of relationships where intimacy can flourish: couple, parental, friendship and sexual.

On the other hand, Garzón states that intimacy is the inner realm that the individual doesn't share with anyone, "the sphere of intimacy is the realm of our thoughts, our decision-making, of doubts that sometimes cannot even be clearly formulated, of what we repress, of what has not yet been expressed" (Garzón, 2003, p. 20). Thus, taking in account Garzón's concept of intimacy, when intimacy is expressed "it ceases to be intimate and is instead transferred to the private, and sometimes even to the public, sphere" (Garzón, 2003, p. 26). Therefore, how can we define intimacy? Is intimacy a practice or a realm? If we take into account all these concepts of intimacy and put them altogether we could arrive to a skeleton definition of intimacy as *the inner thoughts and feelings, which one only share within meaningful relationships (couple, parental, friendship or sexual) which are based in love, liking or caring. Intimacy practices, on the other hand, are the acts of sharing our inner thoughts and feelings with our significant others.*

Moreover, intimacy is a concept which seems to be valued more and more in contemporary society, as Chambers explains: "The economic, cultural and political destabilisation of traditional community values coincide with the ascendance of intimacy, privacy and the project of the self (Chambers, 2006, p. 14)". Foessel (2010) states that intimacy was previously understood as a bastion and reserve against the claims and demands of public life, but nowadays intimacy is an important aspect of defining who we are and therefore it is often publicly exhibited as an ingredient of social identity. He claims that the 'psychological individual' has given way to the 'exposed individual'. Similarly, Mateus distinguish between modern intimacy, which was a physical intimacy, and contemporary intimacy, which is an emotional intimacy, focused in its "relational dimension and the establishment of intersubjective involvements" (Mateus, 2010, p. 62). Following this discussion, van Manen compares online intimacy and offline intimacy related to space, the former being distant and the later being physical. Thus, distant intimacy appears like an oxymoron:

> "Does one not need to be close to experience nearness? It depends on how one understands nearness. Digital intimacy may offer the sensibility of one-to-one closeness, but the one-to-one may be "real" or illusory. I am sitting at my computer chatting on Facebook and

> feeling that I am here with you. Within this binary sphere of intimacy between myself and the screen, you are addressing me, only you and only me (even though many others may be reading your writing and feel the intimacy I feel)." (van Manen, 2010, p. 1029).

Therefore two main questions arise: *Can people really experience intimacy when interacting online?* And if the answer is yes: *Is online intimacy different from offline intimacy?* Some authors suggest that intimacy online in different than intimacy offline. Turkle affirms that digital interaction redefines intimacy and reduces it to easy connections: "When technology engineers intimacy, relationships can be reduced to mere connections. And then, easy connection becomes redefined as intimacy" (Turkle, 2010, p. 26). Turkle states that constant digital connection makes easier to communicate through social media than face-to-face, and it may happen that we reduce some of our existing relationships to simple connections through social media, barely communicating with them offline. On the other hand, people that we meet online or whom we usually interact through social media may become intimate due to the easy accessibility we have to them thanks to the affordances of digital communication. Other scholars believe that whenever intimacy is made public (Sibilia, 2008; Mateus, 2010) it ceases being intimacy as it loses its status when it is advertised. Similarly, Turkle (2010) pointed out that "traditionally the development of intimacy required privacy. Intimacy without privacy reinvents what intimacy means" (Turkle, 2010, p. 172). Sibilia and Mateus apply the Lacanian concept of *Extimacy* (the public exhibition of intimacy) to the social web, as SNSs are public by default, and many intimate interactions can be watched by the other contacts. Nevertheless, Mateus believes that individuals only make public a small part of their inner thoughts and feelings: "Only what is essential to enrich the individual's personality is publicly displayed. Intimacy seems to be composed of more parts than those related to appearance. Individuals' emotions and thoughts, even if exposed, are deeper than those taking part in extimacy" (Mateus, 2010, p. 69). On the other hand, Taddicken and Jers (2011) argue that intimacy decreases by relocating part of the intimate conversation into social media. They suggest that: "although the Social Web allows situations where intimacy with friends or family members can be established through limited access, member registration, etc., the feeling of being alone with other people in the Social Web is often illusive" (Taddicken & Jers, 2011, p. 152). Also, van Manen points out that digital intimacy can be illusory as a result of performance in social media interaction: "I felt close to you but did not realize that it was not you. Or, I may realize that you were not really yourself when you seemed to be showing off and 'posturing' to your readers online through your primed postings and pictures" (van Manen, 2010, p. 1028). Similarly, Ito et al. affirm that SNSs profiles are "key spaces for intimacy performance, providing a variety of ways to signal the intensity of relationships both through textual and visual representation" (Ito et al., 2010, p. 120). Performing, as observed by Baym, can lead to the recognition that behind the text in the SNS there is a real person: "our expression of emotions and

immediacy show others that we are real, available, and that we like them, as does our willingness to entertain them" (Baym, 2010, p. 62). Also, Cohen (2012) argues that in the actual 'culture of performance' the control of the presentation of the self in different ways through some SNSs is used to foster different kind of relationships. Yet this is not a new idea, Goffman (1967) developed the concept of 'drama', which emphasizes the fact that all people interpret roles in the 'drama' of everyday life. For Goffman, interpersonal lives are marked by performance, and life unfolds as a 'drama'. Individuals try to manage the ways that others perceive them, and try to present themselves in a positive way. Hence, SNSs are the new stages where the 'drama' can be also performed.

The extensive disclosure of intimacy through social media is a recent phenomenon that has claimed the attention of many scholars. Joinson et al (2011) argue that people manage their interpersonal boundaries through the amount and depth of information they disclose to others: "by controlling disclosure, individuals manage the degree of intimacy in a relationship" (Joinson et al, 2011, p. 36). Ellison et al. point out that self-disclosure is also necessary in order to gain the benefits from the SNS: "After all, members of one's social network cannot suggest a new job possibility if they do not know s/he is looking, nor can they offer social support if they do not know it is needed" (Ellison et al, 2011, p. 20). Another important reason why people disclose personal information online is to make new friends or find a partner, but this practice is still heavily stigmatized. boyd (2010b) found in her research about the use of MySpace that there is a stigma around people who meet new people online, as they are considered not to be able to make friends offline, apart from the general belief that meeting strangers online is dangerous. Although short-term online friendships or romances have the potential to develop into a long-term relationships (Chambers, 2006; boyd, 2010b), these kind of personal interactions can be seen as an example of the contemporary trend towards ephemeral modes of personal association. Thus, the traditional belief that the development of intimacy requires privacy (Gerstein, 1984; Turkle, 2010) is questioned by the new intimacy practices online.

Sibilia (2008) claims that social media are widely used in order to perform intimacy in public. In this process, Sibilia argues that intimacy ceases to be, as it changes to extimacy. The extreme case of *extimacy* is when people are delighted, even eager, in showing their intimacy in public: clear examples on television are talk shows or reality shows such as Big Brother. In social media this phenomenon has different versions: SNSs being actualized at any time, hyperactive bloggers, live webcams, and so on. This *new media exhibitionism* (Allen-Castellito, 1999) is seen by some authors as empowering. Koskela introduces the concept of *empowering exhibitionism* to describe the practice of revealing one's personal life. Thus, visibility becomes a tool of power by the user that can be managed to rebel against anonymity. Koskela (2004, p. 210) claims that: "exhibitionism is

liberating, because it represents a refusal to be humble". Also, Baym states that disclosing an honest self online can be empowering and liberating: "Practicing skills such as assertiveness can help people to work through issues involving control and mastery, gain competence, and find a comfort which they can then transfer to their embodied encounters" (Baym, 2010, p. 116). On the other hand, there are also risks in the exhibition of intimacy online. Anita Rubin (2011), who examines the concept of emotional rationality through social media, identifies the dangers and potentialities of the disclosure of intimacy in public through the use of social media. Thus, Rubin (2011) suggests that the exhibition of intimacy in public through social media may have negative implications (emotional numbing, commercialization of emotions, social indifference) and positive implications (Neo-solidarity, new social responsibility, sense of community), which differ from the implication of intimacy practices offline.

3. Conclusion

Defining what is private and intimate is a subjective matter, and it is even more complicated when the interaction is through social media due to their affordances. Privacy is increasingly becoming a socio-technical matter, nevertheless it is not reduced to a selection of a serie of parameters, but it is much more sophisticated. Privacy has traditionally been valued because it protects intimacy insomuch as it grants the control over information flow and space which enables us to maintain different degrees of intimacy. Nevertheless, nowadays there is a growing phenomenon of intimacy performed in public. More and more people are exposing their intimate lives through SNSs that are public by default. This practice, which can be both empowering and risky, challenges the traditional concept that the development of intimacy requires privacy. Social media seems to be the new tool for socializing in spite of the risks of exposure. The increasing necessity of permanent hyperconnection with our peers overcomes concerns about privacy. Therefore the main issue is how to negotiate privacy concerns and social capital needs in a social media environment in front of networked publics. Even though different strategies can be used to manage privacy on SNSs to limit self-disclosure to specific audience, intimate information can be leaked to broader audience when interacting through SNSs. For this reason, in recent years, academics have conducted a lot of research about privacy on social media, nevertheless not enough about intimacy. Therefore, more research is necessary in order to map intimacy practices facilitated by SNSs and (re)define intimacy in the context of social media in contemporary society.

Notes

[1] Intimacies of personal identity may include: "close relationships, sexual orientation, alcohol intake, dietary habits, ethnic origin, political beliefs, features of the body and bodily functions, the definitions of *self*, and religious and spiritual beliefs and practices (Nissenbaum, 2010: 123).

[2] Persistent (information online lasts forever); replicable (information online can be copied and posted somewhere else); searchable (information online can be easily searched through a Web search engine such as Google or Yahoo!; and scalable (information online can reach wider audience if it is posted in a popular site) (boyd, 2010a).

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